Prairie Streams (91,189 Stream Miles in Montana)

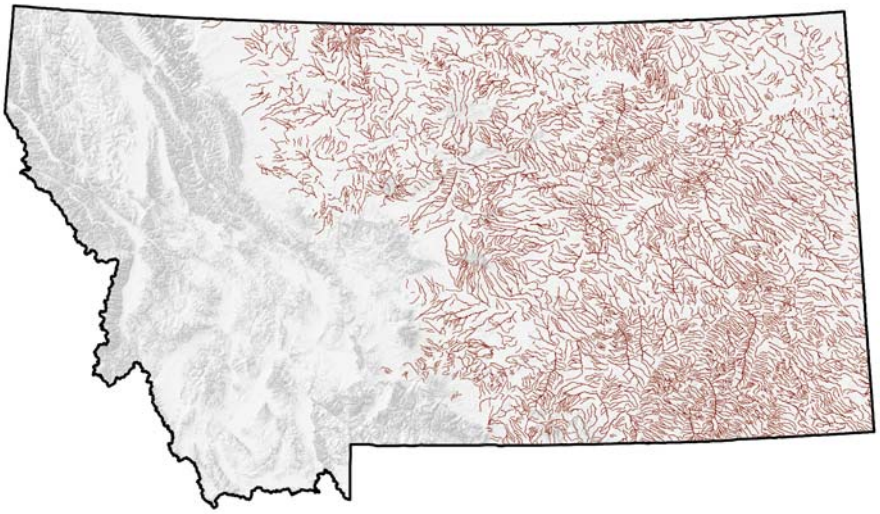

Figure 42. Distribution of Prairie Stream Community Types

There are at least 18,000 miles of prairie streams in Montana that have water either intermittently or permanently flowing through them in an otherwise dry region. Eight specific types of prairie streams were delineated for Montana (Stagliano 2005). These low-elevation streams east of the Rocky Mountains are warmer than their counterparts in western Montana and support a richer and quite different variety of fish. Stagliano (2005) also documented nine fish species group assemblages (SPAs), or community associations, for the prairie stream systems. Many of these streams are slow moving and sometimes turbid and weedy, while those in the northern glaciated plains can be just as clear as a mountain stream. They offer good rearing habitat for associated fish species, support many amphibians and reptiles, and are crucial for populations of terrestrial wildlife. Please refer to Stagliano 2005 for more detailed information regarding aquatic communities in Montana's Missouri River watershed.

Essential Associated Plant Community

Wet sedge (*Carex* spp.)
Bulrush (*Scirpus* spp.)
Rushes (*Juncus* spp.)

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 32 aquatic species that are found within the prairie stream community type, with 25 of these species being essentially associated (essentially associated species are shown in bold). All associations can be found in Table 45.

Fish: Pearl Dace

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Prairie stream riparian habitat effected by range management practices	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices
	Support all management practices that maintain riparian vegetation and streambank and channel stability in excellent condition
Stream diversions and dewatering	Implementation of various water conservation or flow management practices that restore essential habitats and simulate the natural hydrograph
	Protect instream flow reservations
	Increased installation of stockwater wells in place of irrigation ditches
	Increase instream flows through water leasing and water conservation measures
Entrainment of fish in irrigation diversions	Screening or modification of irrigation diversions or other water intakes in a manner that prevents entrainment of fishes
Poorly understood impacts of petroleum exploration and extraction	Increase research and scientific studies on impacts of coal bed methane on prairie stream environments in both Montana and Wyoming
Introductions of non-native fishes	Programs to help control exotic species and promote natural habitats that support native species
	Protection of native species through habitat protection and enhancement, controlling and in some cases removing non-native species, and restoring or introducing native fishes into suitable waters

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